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HOW TO MAKE AN ART EXHIBITION SOME FACTS IN ANSWER TO MR. MORRIS'S FANCIES

BY JOSEPH PENNELL, N.A.

THEORETICALLY Mr. Harrison Morris's article in the November number is excellent. In it he maintains that an exhibition of art should be made up from invited works and those submitted to a jury; but all properly organized art exhibitions are gotten together by exactly this method. Yet Mr. Morris says "there is no settled code." But, I answer, there is.

So he wants to introduce the "adventurer." Further he says "to make an art show that succeeds one must have a Showman." I agree with him entirely. And then he goes on to describe the "Showman" whom he creates; for his "equipment he must have taste, tact, knowledge of color and form, orderliness and a business head." If he has the last, the want of the rest can easily be supplied. Now from this I take it: Mr. Morris means his "Showman" should be a universal genius—and if he could only paint, among his other accomplishments—why, he would, maybe, be perfect! But I never knew of but two art "Showmen" who possessed even "business heads." They were a success because they had the brains to bother about their business which they knew, and not interfere with art which they knew they could never know. But somehow, when you come to think of it, the most successful showmen are artists.

No such Showman would pretend "to select the works . . . to hang them . . . to please the observer" as Mr. Morris suggests. And further he says the Showman shall watch over selection, watch over installation . . . "have a managing mind" and I would add, that mind should be furnished with an accurate clerical hand, account books and forms, and a sense of working the business end of the exhibition—the rarest qualification amongst business men—and Showmen.

And finally Mr. Morris would not exclude selection by a jury—but would the Showman permit it? Not if he got the power Mr. Morris thinks he should have—unless as a sop to the poor, but unfortunately necessary artist!

Now when Mr. Morris's Showman has "arranged the activities that lead up to the opening display" [I suppose he means when the Showman has properly boomed the show] it will be of no use—"it is a failure unless it gives enjoyment and gives it to many people." But is this altogether true? The people enjoy what they are told to (rather they pretend to). They hate art, except the "movies" and photographs of themselves and paintings they buy for a "rise on the market."

But much as they hate art, if the Showman can boom the show properly, they will crowd in and hide their real feelings in the crowd; and a few may learn a little. And what a chance the Showman has, and how he takes advantage of it—or some do! No country has so many galleries, no galleries so much money, so many prizes—and all with a few exceptions devoted to the encouragement of American art and the exclusion of foreigners. And what do the artists do? Take the endless prizes and profit by the endless advantages that art exhibi-

tions offer to oil painters—the only form of art, of American art almost, as yet encouraged. And this is something to be thankful for.

Then Mr. Morris laments: "leading artists do not want to put their best things in a show." If the show is really the greatest art exhibition in the land they will fight to get in—even if there are no money prizes—even if there are no medals—even if there are few sales—even if they have to submit to a jury—and in the great international exhibitions all works are submitted to a jury; but invitations for certain pictures, desired from certain artists, are sent out by the jury and that settles all difficulties.

Mr. Morris is rather severe on juries whom he calls, or makes his Showman call with insistent fury "a fallible or half-baked person or group of persons through whom to make the choice of pictures or sculptures." This is rather hard on a jury of artists; yet here I have met schoolmarms as reporters on art—I never met a critic on a jury—ambassadors, bankers and architects, directors, judging paintings—or being told how to by a Showman and his crowd. This gives variety I know and amusing results—to all but the artists judged. Still I think, if the jury is composed of artists: artists would rather be judged by their peers than by Mr. Morris's Showman who by inviting works would constitute himself a jury; and I think Mr. Morris's description of a Showman applied to an artists' jury somewhat more appropriate. Yet he goes further and says "you can't have an ideally selected group of invited works with an ignorant, a conceited or a grafting instrument of choice."

I quite agree with him. But what of the Showman to whom all this most truly applies? Still Mr. Morris is on the search for the Showman, he says, who can perform "the nice and useful task of invitations" with "sympathy, tact, taste and temperament." So are all of us artists on the hunt for a Showman who possesses these qualities, but we have never found him outside the ranks of us artists, and we never will, because he would be a great artist himself—and not a little Showman, who, when let alone, is liable to wreck the whole. If Mr. Morris's ideal could be found "the public eager for entertainment would respond with admiration" and it is the business of the Showman to make them admire and pay for the privilege of doing so in public; but if they dare to give "healthy" (as they think) criticism they should be chucked out by the Showman. It is their business to admire. Do they dare to give "healthy criticism" to their parson? or their tailor? And yet, after a course of ten lectures on æsthetics they will give "healthy criticism" to men who have passed all their lives in the practice of their profession!

Again and again Mr. Morris returns to the jury which oppresses and depresses him; and he says "if the chosen power is genuine and able and impartially business-like it will want to miss no talent";

but even artistic juries, which should be composed of men—no women—of different views are fallible or “half-baked” Mr. Morris says; and if he thinks them so, why, there is an escape: the Exhibition without a Jury—which does afford entertainment to the public and even to artists! And then we artists are to “educate” the people. Did the early painters and sculptors “educate” the Assyrians, the Greeks, the Italians, their contemporaries? No, they showed them painted and sculptured works and the people knew—because they were all about them and were real to them. Now most art works must be explained by docents or dictionaries—and even then the educated public rightly prefers a ball game.

What the public should come to see in an exhibition is the best work the artist can show them, presented in the best manner; and that they must be made to accept, after the artists have selected and presented it; and it is the duty of the Showman to make them accept it.

Then Mr. Morris says that many exhibitions “rely on the entrance fees of their shows for support.” It is a far bigger matter than this. Why did Paris devote a large section of the Champs Elysées to picture shows? Why did Venice close her public garden to the public for six months every other year? Why did London give artists the most valuable site in Piccadilly? Because, though the artists and Showmen have made a good thing from gate-money and sales, these three great cities have made a fortune and a reputation out of art shows—and so made themselves Meccas for the people who do not go to be educated or elevated or uplifted, but go because it is the correct thing to see the Salon, the Royal Academy, the Venice Biennial—and also because there were cheap excursions to those cities during the exhibitions—quite business-like, of course—and . . . the great artist who has not been a great business man never lived!

And New York, the business center of the world to come, hasn't got a public exhibition gallery half as good as many a Western town; New York refused to allow the National Academy to change a useless office into a Palace of Art—and yet that city prates endlessly of art.

It is education on practical business lines concerning subjects of this sort the people want when they get a gallery; but then the American business man is neither practical nor business-like—though he knows he is! When they have an exhibition the Showman will crop up—dozens of him.

Mr. Morris also believes that the artist appeals “to the approval of the press and the people.” No artist does. He loves notice and hates to be ignored; but whether that notice does good or harm is another question. An artist works to please himself, not the public or the press. Mr. Morris ends by saying he does “not understand why an artist should object to the dual system of exhibition by invitation and jury.” I never heard of a real artist who did. If the artist does object he can go to those shows which are absolutely in the hands of the jury—if he can find a society without members or others who are *hors concours* of the jury—or else he can hang himself in one of those machines

which have no jury and hang every one who pays for space to expose himself on.

There are only two difficulties in making an art show and these have to be faced: Who shall secure the works? and How shall the jury be composed?

Now the best way to prove the truth of what I write is to give facts and cite examples and I would take these facts from my own experience as a member of invitation and hanging committees and also of the jury at various international and national exhibitions in Europe and America held during the last twenty years.

The best-managed, the most artistic exhibitions ever held, the exhibitions which set up a standard all over Europe were those of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers given in London and other cities in 1898 and continued during the following four or five years. They were artistically successful because they were organized and carried out by the artist members according to a definite scientific scheme; and the scheme was a very simple one, and worked perfectly as long as we had a working President, viz.: James McNeil Whistler. Since then, as he mentioned, the Society has fallen into the clutches of the British and art has abandoned it.

The scheme was this: a Jury was elected composed of three painters, three sculptors, three engravers. These three classes of artists were selected by ballot from the Council of the Society by the votes of the Council. The members had no vote. The Jury had absolute control of the artistic management of all exhibitions given by the Society for the year following their election.

The Council asked each member of the Society for a list of artists to contribute to the forthcoming exhibition, and as the Society had members all over the artistic world, we were in touch with all artistic movements. The lists sent in were used as basis and guide, and supplemented by our own knowledge of contemporary work. Then the Jury chose three of its members: a sculptor, a painter and a graver, to visit the great exhibitions on the continent of Europe and select works for our show; and, two or three times, members of the Jury came over here. They also asked members in America to send suggestions. These visits were timed so as to see as many shows as possible: the European exhibitions in London, Paris, Venice and Berlin and other cities opening in the spring. And so the rounds of the shows and the studios of artists working in those cities were easily made. It was more difficult to get the work from all the artists later. The works marked for selection were chosen and recorded. But no layman did the choosing, only the recording—the Showman's work.

Afterward came the question of getting the works, for there is no circuit system in Europe as there is here; or rather there was none. Everything had to be selected for exhibition a year in advance and in competition with other societies—though the Selection Committee continued in office till the end of the following year's exhibition and managed its arrangement, and we had to fight the great galleries and powerful artistic bodies. But the artists usually promised what we wanted—if we were first in the field

—and we usually wanted a group of works by *one man*—another condition for making a good show. What they sent was another story; and we also had to pay transportation and insurance. Then during all the year we or the Showman under our direction, quietly boomed the coming exhibition, though we had neither money prizes nor medals as baits. When the time of the exhibition approached, invitations and circulars were sent out, as well as endless press notices, and the only difference between our forms and those issued here was a single sentence printed in red ink stating “the Council reserves the right to reject any work, whether invited or not, which they might think undesirable to hang.” This was inserted after one memorable legal experience, and printed in three languages; we had a Showman who could write in four.

As the works invited and submitted came in, though they were distinguished by various colored labels, they were all piled together—sometimes invited works were kept apart, but usually not; then the whole Jury met, of which the Traveling Invitation Committee was, as I have said, a part. They resolved themselves into a Jury of Selection and everything passed before them. The invitations had been given out with an idea of the space to be filled, and not haphazard, and a record of the subjects and sizes of invited works had been kept by the Showman. Then the Jury passed on everything in the galleries and a few works were marked A—most B and still more X or “out.” But even that was not final. The paintings were judged by the painters, the sculpture by the sculptors and the engravings [which included water-colors, pastels and drawings] by the engravers. Then the same three committees, each still managing its own group, became the hangers, and they, after seeing, inviting, selecting the works, knew them—knew what had been sent in, knew what was in, knew what had been thrown out. Then the hanging by the same committees commenced. It was not left to workmen to fit in the surroundings of the “centers,” but each work was brought up, a pattern of the wall was made on the floor by the Jury in the best fashion of color and design, carefully spaced, carefully hung. The painters hung the paintings and sculptors placed the sculpture and the engravers the prints, for the best hangers in the world [and the best are here] will make a mess of anything left to them, though they have the best will in the world.

Then, out would go invited works and in would come submitted ones, and suddenly there would be a hitch, a stop—for nothing would fit in a certain spot, nothing would go with the color-scheme of the wall! Then a Juror would remember that some rejected work was just what was wanted, just what would tell, just what would fill that space. So back from the cellars it would come, and sometimes I have seen the rejected work, if not made into the corner-stone—at any rate into the center of a panel . . . and this is the only way an exhibition can be properly selected or invited, properly judged, properly hung: by artists for artists—and by one Jury of artists—and that the smallest possible.

Of course the manager or secretary or Showman always attended; but he had no voice in the selection or hanging; yet sometimes his knowledge and his papers were of the greatest use . . . and

this is the only way in which an art exhibition can be properly made. After all was hung the whole Council resolved itself into a Revision Committee. They frequently made suggestions, but these were seldom accepted by the Jury and only when the whole body thought them an improvement; and as the catalogue was usually already prepared and the numbers were usually on the works, it was almost impossible to make changes. Another point was: the names of the Jury were kept secret instead of being published, and the whole Society, instead of one or two members of the Jury, was blamed by the “chucked.” And above all our policy or watchword was OUT! no matter who painted the work, whether it was invited or not. If at the last moment it would not fit into our scheme, out it went! Sometimes it got a new frame or the frame a coat of paint. Sometimes the work was changed.

It is only by such a method, only by the exclusion of the Showman-manager, the Secretary, the Director—only by a committee of artists doing all the work, that a good show can be gotten together, a show into which artists struggle and fight to get their work. And yet there were no money prizes, no medals—very few sales. But it was an art show—a show by artists for artists; and all the while the Showman was working the business, the publicity end of the show; and if there were proprietor, manager, directors and guarantors they attended to their part of the work and were not permitted to interfere with us.

Here, how different! Here there are prizes and medals and sales. There are half a dozen juries in different centers, each knowing nothing of what the other is doing or the space the works selected by them are to occupy. There is a Showman inviting works the Jury has never been told about. There is a big central Jury which knows nothing of what has been accepted by the local Juries and so passes or rejects what has alone come before it. And finally there is a separate and often different Hanging Committee, which has to hang everything passed by the Juries, a committee without power, overwhelmed with works that never should have been painted . . . what wonder then, after settling their own places and the other centers (O, we did that, too) they leave the rest to the hangers and retire to more serious occupations? What wonder is it then, that many American art shows look like auction rooms?

It is amazing how bad, by this although academic system, a really good show can be made to look, while artists who are given charge of a bad show, if they know how, can make it look really well! There is as much art in hanging as in painting and there is art in the Showman's department too. And then, the prizes awarded by another committee or the directors of the gallery! and now by the vote of the people! No money prizes ever should be awarded, ever were awarded during the last few years in Europe, in open competition.

Never shall I forget the First Venetian Exhibition—art critics on the Jury. I saw that scandal here this year; but the critics in Venice had an international reputation, those here were scarcely known locally.

Venice abandoned money prizes and adopted pro-

professional juries of artists after that first attempt, reserving to itself a Council of Three—instead of Ten as their ancestors had—a final Revising Jury. And I well remember on one occasion, after hanging a room, that on coming back the next morning and finding its crowning glory gone, I asked why, and was told: because the Revising Jury said the work was not up to the standard of Venice! Which was perfectly true and I could but agree; and that work was selected by people who knew nothing of standards and thought anything good enough for the Dagoes! And then again in Rome a few years later: the Jury had to vote three or four money prizes—one to painters, one to sculptors, one to draftsmen, one to engravers—they were never voted for as *artists*. After three weeks of balloting we agreed that it was grossly unjust and unfair to say that one painter was financially but not artistically superior to all the world! and so the prizes were divided. Since then the giving of prizes has been abandoned in Europe. Here, prize-giving is growing and stifling art, for either the prizes must be awarded over and over to the same people, and they are in different exhibitions, or those artists who have won them already must die off or degenerate, or be barred from prize-taking, in order that in-

ferior painters can gain them; or else new artists must be invented—which seems to be an easy matter!

An exhibition which gets its reputation by buying it, is not artistic but shopkeeping; medals are the only things that should be awarded. And the money prizes should be devoted to the purchase of the works exhibited or deserving to be purchased, as in all other countries—and in some exhibitions here. If the Showman is a genius as a salesman, the artists will call him blessed.

Thus the artists find encouragement, help and support, not in being tagged onto a Showman or a Committee of Laymen. Until the art affairs of the whole country are managed by artists and not by Showmen or benevolent men and women, we will be far, in the graphic and plastic arts, from occupying that position which, ostrich-like, we believe to be ours. Art for artists, as well as art for art's sake is the only thing worth working for.

This is the way and the only way to get an art show by artists for artists—a show the public will crowd to see.

Joseph Pennell

THREE SONNETS TO BLANCHE

I

I do not love to see your beauty fire
The light of eager love in every eye,
Nor the unconscious ardor of desire
Mantle a cheek when you are passing by;
When in the loud world's giddy thoroughfare
Your holy loveliness is noised about—
Lips that my love has prayed to—the gold hair
Where I have whispered all my secrets out.

O then I would I had you in my arms,
Desolate, lonely, broken, and forlorn,
Stripped of your splendor, spoiled of all your charms,
So that my love might prove her haughty scorn—
So I might catch you to my heart, and prove
'Tis not your beauty only that I love!

II

I thought of you when in the pallid dawn
Glimmered day's loveliest and loneliest star,
Infinitely in the pale blue withdrawn,
Touching my heart with beauty from afar;
Where bending with her blossoms the white spray,
After the passing of a sudden shower,
Trembled all dewy in the wind of May—
I thought of your white loveliness in flower.

And once in the deep wonder of a dream
You came to me, and your clear face was bowed
Over my face, like light on a dark stream,
And your soft hair fell 'round me like a cloud;
And then I woke—but still when you were gone
Like music in my heart you lingered on.

III

'Tis not your darling loveliness alone
That draws me, the proud splendor of your face;
Beautiful as a conqueror's on his throne,
Or a swift runner's in an eager race;
Not that carved throat, that chalice of sweet sound,
Nor eyes that are the heavens of my prayer,
Pale, perfect brows from many a conquest crowned
Victorious, nor the halo of your hair.

These the dull crowd gape after, little they
Guess the still lovelier being hid from view,
The pilgrim in this prison-house of clay,
Which is yourself, the very soul of you—
Whose banner Love here flings to heaven unfurled,
And bares his shining sword to all the world!

John Hall Wheelock